

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

**PITUOPHIS MELANOLEUCUS DESERTICOLA** (Great Basin Gopher Snake). **BEHAVIOR.** We report here on an unusual encounter in the wild between a *Pituophis melanoleucus deserticola* and a golden-mantled ground squirrel (*Spermophilus lateralis*).

On 28 May 1993, in a small limestone canyon near the Colorado-Utah border in Dinosaur National Monument, Uintah Co., Utah we found a ground squirrel challenging a *P. m. deserticola* of approximately 165 cm TL. The ground squirrel was making no attempt to flee its potential predator, which was loosely coiled in low vegetation and obviously had eaten recently. If the snake moved, the ground squirrel would feign a charge or actually dart in to attack the snake, usually about the head, and then quickly retreat to a log 40 cm from the snake. The ground squirrel appeared to be defending the area around the log. Despite the attacks, the snake, which had been bloodied below its left eye, also was not making an attempt to depart.

We observed this encounter from a stream bank at a distance of 2 m for 10 min. The temperature was 22–25°C under sunny skies. The encounter ended when the ground squirrel was frightened away by a flash from our camera. At that time, we captured the snake, and it was easily observed that it had recently eaten two prey items.

We know of no other observation in the wild where a *P. melanoleucus* was held at bay by a ground squirrel or other potential prey. We believe the ground squirrel was defending a nest in the vicinity of the log, because 15 min after we released the snake, the ground squirrel returned to the log and appeared to search for the snake in the area of the confrontation.

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